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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this practicum was to broaden and strengthen the classroom assessment of literacy development in a third grade. Goals were to implement authentic assessment techniques, to involve both students and parents in goal setting and ongoing evaluation processes, and to develop writing portfolios exhibiting a wide range of student performance. A staff survey was administered comparing standardized tests to course content being implemented; a survey was conducted among third grade parents to ascertain their preferences for report cards or conferences, as well as their evaluation of the effectiveness of conferences; frequent conferences were held with parents to set goals for, and report progress on, student achievement; scaffold conferences were implemented with individual students on a regular basis to review goals and progress; steps in the writing process were modeled; a variety of authentic assessments were implemented, including the portfolio and observation approaches; and several portfolio workshops and alternative assessment presentations were given at district, county, and state levels. Results of the practicum were positive. Analysis of data revealed that the authentic assessment methods monitored through scaffold conferences taught students to assume increased responsibility for their own learning programs. More frequent conferences between parents and teacher, plus the implementation of a criteria based report card, created more meaningful dialogue about the educational program and individual student progress. (Two tables of data and two figures are included. Nine appendixes--containing surveys, a teacher scoring sheet and checkoff grid, report card criteria, and parent suggestions--and 44 references are attached.) (Author/SR)

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Improving Evaluation of Third Grade Literacy Using Authentic Techniques and Self Assessment

by

Linda Scott

Cluster 33

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A Practicum II Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Degree of Doctor of Education

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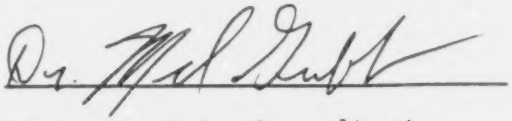
Dr. Mel Grubb 

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This practicum report was submitted by Linda J. Scott under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

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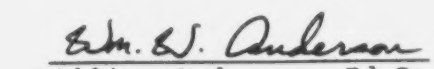
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ABSTRACT

Improving Evaluation of Third Grade Literacy Using Authentic Assessment Techniques and Self Assessment. Scott, Linda J., 1992: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Authentic assessment/ Elementary Reading/ Parent Involvement/Portfolios/Ongoing Assessment/Parent Teacher Conferences/Evaluation.

This practicum was designed to broaden and strengthen the classroom assessment of literacy development. A primary goal was to implement authentic assessment techniques to better meet the academic goals of education. A second aim of the practicum was to involve both students and parents in goal setting and ongoing evaluation processes. A third objective was to develop Writing Portfolios exhibiting a wide range of student performance.

The writer administered a staff survey comparing standardized tests to course content being implemented; conducted a survey among third grade parents to ascertain their preferences for report cards or conferences, as well as their evaluation of the effectiveness of conferences; held frequent conferences with parents to set goals for, and report progress on, student achievement; implemented scaffold conferences with individual students on a regular basis to review goals and progress; modeled the steps in the writing process; implemented a variety of authentic assessments including the portfolio and observation approaches; and participated in several portfolio workshops and alternative assessment presentations at district, county and state levels.

The results of the practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that the authentic assessment methods monitored through scaffold conferences taught students to assume increased responsibility for their own learning program. More frequent conferences between parents and teacher, plus the implementation of a criteria based report card, created more meaningful dialogue about the educational program and individual student progress. The student portfolio is becoming a crucial tool as tangible and visual proof of pupil growth in reading, writing and the language arts.

* * * * * * *

Permission Statement

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Linda J. Scott (signature)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This suburban elementary school served 465 pupils in grades kindergarten through six. The facility, located within a residential tract, was constructed in 1963. Approximately half of the student body lived in single family tract homes built in 1960. The remaining families either rented homes or lived in low-income apartments, some of which were government subsidized. Many households were headed by a single parent and roughly 12% of the families qualified for some kind of assistance such as Medical or the school free lunch program. Several of the students had parents who also attended this school as children. The student population showed a 30% annual turnover rate.

The immediate community reflected a high-lower class environment of skilled and unskilled workers. Many parents were employed in aircraft industries or the military. The neighborhood contained a city park, several fast food and convenience stores in strip shopping centers, a few gas

stations, and drive-through dairies. The school district served five small urban communities.

The majority of students could walk to school, however many parents drove their children because of increasing efforts by older youths to recruit nearby junior high students for early gang involvement. The frequency of gang members wearing their colors to identify their affiliations was a community concern. Fewer than 50 pupils were bussed to attend the Korean magnet program at the site.

This institution reflected several unique features. First, it was designated as a Korean magnet site, attracting students from throughout the district who needed instruction from a bilingual teacher while they developing English proficiency. The student body population was composed of 21% Asian, 19% Hispanic, 8% Black, 45% Caucasian, and less than 1% American Indian and Portuguese students. Limited English Proficient pupils comprised 5% of the student body.

Another unique feature was the extensive implementation of cooperative learning techniques in the daily program for the preceding four years. Many educators have visited to observe this teaching strategy. Approximately 30% of the students were identified as Chapter I, having test scores in Reading and/or Math below the 40th percentile. Extra funding provided additional services to assist these students in core subject areas.

The site housed a Head Start class for four-year-olds and an extended day care program offering before and after school care for students. Unfortunately, the latter program had to be self-supporting, therefore many families were unable to avail themselves of this much-needed service.

There was a staff of 19 teachers, 10 half-day instructional aides and 10 part time support personnel in addition to two custodians, two secretaries and a site administrator. One-third of the teachers were bilingual-bicultural Korean. There was little change in staff annually, with the average length of time the staff had worked in the district averaging over 16 years.

The coming school year was sure to be a challenge as the staff was implementing a school-within-a-school program under a state planning grant in preparation for restructuring. A primary staggered reading schedule was to be replaced by a back-to-back morning reading program. Significantly more teacher planning time was being included in the regular school day. It was to be a time of exploring new options as staff enhanced their knowledge of various learning theories in preparation for submitting a school restructuring proposal in the spring.

There were many positive and meaningful programs in place at the school, but there were also some pressing issues which needed to be addressed. A recent Self-Study

and Report of Findings from a site program quality review both confirmed the need and desire for more team planning, collaboration, sharing of information from conferences, and review of school assessment techniques. While the whole staff had not chosen to participate in the restructuring program, clearly the majority of the teachers viewed this as an opportunity to significantly improve student achievement.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer had an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in Early Childhood Education attained in 1975. The writer had worked 26 years in the district. Her teaching experience encompassed preschool, elementary, adult, community college and university levels. During the twelve years she served as a district administrator, her responsibilities included group goal setting, budget management, program implementation, grant administration, and personnel supervision.

The writer had been involved in many staff development opportunities both as a participant and as a trainer within a variety of curricula and supervision areas at school, district, county and state levels. The writer had served on a number of district curriculum and textbook selection committees including social studies, health, visual and

performing arts, instructional television and substance abuse.

As a member of the school Leadership Team, the writer participated in the formulation of the proposal for restructuring and would be active in all phases of its implementation.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Educators recognize the legitimate role of evaluation in shaping instruction to meet student needs. The historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act linked federal funding to achievement test results, increasing the value placed on formal standardized measurement (Haney, 1985).

In the writer's district, all students in grades kindergarten through six were given the Comprehensive Achievement Test (CAT) annually, while third and sixth graders were also involved in the state assessment program (CAP). In addition, this school, and selected others, administered the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), to determine student eligibility for the Chapter I Program. In the last school year, the CAP test was suspended by the state due to lack of funding.

While many teachers at all grade levels use informal tests to measure on-going student achievement, few of them had sufficient skills to design and implement assessment

techniques which were authentic and improved upon the traditional paper and pencil, short answer format. The difficulty in matching curriculum and test items often needed to be pointed out to teachers. Regardless of the subject matter of the test, it is the response required of the learner which gives him opportunities to prove his competency.

The problem faced by the writer's school staff and by other elementary level teachers of literacy curriculum throughout the state, was threefold: how to implement more appropriate assessment techniques in the classroom, how to involve students and their parents in continuous evaluation of literacy development, and how to keep students and parents better informed about such achievement, since standardized tests were not able to do so.

Flood and Lapp (1989) commented, "When a teacher has to show parents a standardized test that reports their child's score in the 30th or 40th percentile year after year, it seems to parents as though no progress has been made" (p. 508). Yet teachers are eminently aware of ongoing progress by individual students.

Hood (1989) stated positively, "All children grow. That growth is documentable. And in their own good time they all bloom. They are neither losers nor potential losers. They are learners" (p. 43).

Students seek feedback on their learning efforts. Relegating academic achievement to points and letters alone does not provide appropriate or specific feedback which students need in order to direct their learning. Better methods of assessment and reporting should involve the students directly. Self assessment should be an educational goal.

With the recent introduction of a literature based curriculum, more time was being allotted daily for independent reading and writing; teachers read aloud frequently; more literature was integrated into the curriculum; and increased time was used for student interaction processes. Yet few teachers had established tracking systems in their classrooms to monitor emerging literacy progress.

Better use could be made of the testing program if teachers became cognizant of the purposes for each evaluation instrument used with their own students. Teachers needed assistance in developing alternative, authentic classroom assessments, as well as implementing techniques for monitoring and reporting student progress.

If these problems concerning assessment of literacy were resolved, the following would be evident:
Teachers, administrators, parents and students would recognize the need for classroom assessment and value its

use in guiding literacy development. The school staff would become better informed about alternative, authentic assessment techniques and be able to share promising practices. Parents and students would become actively involved in the assessment and reporting processes. Students would spend more time helping one another in reading, writing and speaking skills through a wider range of learning and assessment procedures. Students and parents would become more informed about student progress in reading and writing. Teachers and students would acknowledge and celebrate learning success on an on-going basis.

The problem was that there existed no on-going classroom monitoring of reading and writing development. Without meaningful assessment of literacy learning, there could be no purposeful adjustment of instruction to maximize learning experiences.

Problem Documentation

In the writer's work setting, a survey was used with parents at the end of the prior school year to determine strengths and weaknesses of existing assessment and reporting techniques. With the literature based curriculum, reading, writing, spelling and language were reported as a single, letter grade making it difficult for parents to

ascertain specific student strengths, weaknesses, and areas of growth.

In an informal survey of all the teachers on the writer's staff, it was estimated that no more than 70% of the reading/language items on standardized state tests related to course content being implemented. (See Appendix A) It was difficult to be specific when the tests were secured in the district office until annual testing was conducted.

It has become increasingly difficult for Chapter I students to master grade level skills and concepts as they enter each grade functioning significantly behind entry level expectations. These students may indeed demonstrate major gains in learning during a school year yet score low on the standardized tests. There were 16 identified Chapter I students in the writer's class of 31 students.

The State Department of Education was presently offering incentive grants to facilitate school restructuring. Many schools, including the writer's work site, were investigating alternative assessment strategies in conjunction with restructuring efforts.

Staff input during a recent formal school review indicated both a need and a desire for more authentic assessments and increased opportunities for collegial planning and sharing. Several staff members had voiced a

desire to consider revising letter-grade report cards at the site as a restructuring component.

Valencia (1990a) validated the assessment reform effort by noting that with an expanded definition of assessment, a wide variety of indicators of growth are to be sought throughout the learning cycle, honoring both the process and the products of learning.

Causative Analysis

Nickse (1989) noted one impediment to parent involvement in schools as the conflict in roles between teacher and mother. Many teachers express a desire to have parents volunteer in classrooms and become involved in the learning process, but do little to actually welcome them to the school setting.

California was the first state to shift its testing policy to a performance assessment program. Shepard (1989) commented that educators and legislators in California have a clear vision of a powerful curriculum which considers the nature of learning.

Efforts were underway to conclude revision of the CAP test and reinstate it as a statewide performance based assessment. While this would address part of the questionable testing format issues, there was still a need

to address the discrepancy between curriculum and test content.

Though some teachers may spend up to 30% of their teaching day involved in some form of assessment, the average elementary teacher devotes 5% of annual teaching time on testing. (Stiggins, 1988; Tindal & Marston, 1990) Subsequently, it was interesting to note that many teacher training programs did not include a course in tests and measurement. (Stiggins, 1988) Worthen and Spandel (1991) observed, "When educational tests are used in misleading or harmful ways, inadequate training of educators is often at fault" (p. 68-69).

Educators have accepted testing as an activity which must be done to satisfy others rather than for themselves. Valencia (1990a) asserted, "Instead, assessment must be viewed as a process within our control that helps us evaluate how well we have learned and what we need to learn next" (p. 338). Teachers usually do not teach students that assessment is a personal responsibility and involve them in the process of self assessment. Yet as Johnston (1987) reported, failure to self correct is the clearest indication of reading difficulties and it is self evaluation which is the core of all stages of the writing process.

According to Wiggins (1989), "A number of reasons are often cited for retaining 'objective' tests (the design of

which, he notes, are usually quite 'subjective'), among them: the unreliability of teacher-created tests and the subjectivity of human judgment" (p. 710). Tierney, Carter and Desai (1991) cited ease of scoring and grading as major guidelines for test structure and practice. While teachers acknowledge the important role of on-going classroom assessment, those outside the classroom need to value and accept such methods.

In summary, there were many causes contributing to the lack of more authentic, on-going classroom assessments. A significant number of teachers were not prepared to design or implement such strategies; parents had not been shown the value of these measures and continued to regard standardized tests more highly, even when statistical scores are incomprehensible; students had yet to learn the importance of self assessment; and, there had been little, if any, opportunity for staff to work collegially on improving assessment, monitoring and reporting techniques.

Relationship of Problem to the Literature

Teachers often request parent support both within and outside of the classroom. Studies support parent involvement. A report from the U.S. Department of Education Clearinghouse on Adult Education proclaimed:

> Parent involvement in children's schooling influence student achievement, attendance, motivation, self concept, and behavior. Children of parents who read to their children, have books in the home, have a positive attitude toward school, and have high achievement expectations, tend to become higher achievers than those of parents who do not. Adults who have not mastered the basic skills cannot model appropriate literacy behavior and often pass on to their children the attitudes and abilities that keep them from breaking the cycle of illiteracy. (p. 1)

According to Friederiksen (1984), almost every state has legislated some sort of testing program. Holding schools accountable for the achievement of its students is the increasing role of such testing. Ultimately, such accountability may lead to changes in curriculum, reassignment of staff, and pressure to teach to the test, all in hopes of improving test performance.

Considerable experience, both in the United States and abroad, has repeatedly shown that when emphasis is placed on test results, the beneficiary may be the test scores rather than more general learning (Haney, 1985). This may be the result of teaching to the test or possibly the repeated use of the same test year after year. Test scores may show improvement while actual achievement may not change (Shepard, 1989). Yet standardized testing in American schools is rising (Haney, 1985).

Wiggins (1987) contrasted medieval or pre-modern instruction and assessment with modern authentic assessment. The medieval approach incorporated indoctrination lectures and required students to memorize facts in order to 'know' them. Conversely, authentic assessment recognizes that this method does not offer proof of knowledge, and instead requires students to show evidence that they can use knowledge and are able to critique it. While the medieval system is easier to score, authentic assessment is based on model-practice-feedback leading to evaluation of the important elements of performance to guide instruction.

Educators accepted the role of testing but controversy has centered around the selection of specific measuring tools (Bertrand, 1991). There was a need to bring assessment in line with instruction as an integral part of this cycle. There was a widespread perception that teaching and testing were out of sync (Mitchell, 1990; Worthen and Spandel, 1991).

According to Shepard (1989), while standardized tests served as reasonable indicators of student learning twenty years ago, tests alone were inadequate and misleading as measures of achievement today. There was a great need to redesign assessment procedures to resemble real life challenges.

Frederiksen (1984) contended that it was the failure of educational tests to represent the full spectrum of knowledge and skills that led to the elimination of teaching important skills not covered on the standardized tests. With increasing use and importance placed on standardized tests, bias may be significant.

Shepard (1989) commented that teachers must recognize existing tests as less than perfect representations limited to the simple knowledge level and notice the important learning goals usually omitted by the testing process.

Bertrand (1991) observed that public school classrooms most often test lower order thinking skills, even though mere recall of facts would not ensure knowledge nor acquisition of skills (Clay, 1990). Mitchell (1990) wrote, "Multiple choice testing and its corollary, multiple choice teaching, are major contributors to the boredom that pervades American classrooms" (p. 36).

Baskwill and Whitman (1988) asserted that the public and even some educators have been misled into believing that standardized tests produce an accurate view of student achievement. LeMahieu (1990) pointed out the incongruity of valid quality assessments frequently producing non-relevant and unused information.

Both students and teachers may suffer negative effects from inadequate or inappropriate measures. When students

are not involved in planning their own academic program, they lack a vested interest. Goals set by others may reinforce a sense of student failure, leading to school drop out. Teachers are expected to ignore their knowledge about how students learn and teach to the test in order to be perceived as successful in their role. Conversely, when students and teachers are actively involved in all phases of assessment and learning processes, both become empowered and more self-confident (Hanson, 1989; Stiggins, 1988).

Among the many failures of present testing are:

* the amount of time entailed in administering and scoring,
* results which are not helpful to individual students, confusing to parents and only partially understood by teachers,
* the test language which is unfamiliar to students,
* the one-time measure which may or may not indicate what a student actually knows, and
* the format of one right answer to achieve efficiency. (Baskwill & Whitman, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Worthen & Spandel, 1991).

In addition, Wiggins (1990) pointed out the absurdity of time constraints on tests noting the improbability of producing any quality evidence of learning under such circumstances. Shepard (1989) questioned the continuing high regard the public gives standardized tests in light of

the extensive negative issues. Johnston (1987) asserted that we have been valuing the wrong sort of evaluation expertise given the inefficiency of present evaluation tools and methods.

Frequently evaluation was described as educational testing but most of it had far less to do with teaching and learning and more relevant to school administration and educational bureaucracy (Haney, 1985).

According to Hedges and Kane (1968) the development of a viable classroom assessment system interpretable to parents, useful to teachers, and intrinsic to the formation of individual education plans was the problem.

Tests purporting to evaluate the pupils' vocabulary used words out of context in unreal texts. Assessment can and should reflect relevant real-world activities and expectations (Baskwill & Whitman, 1988). It would be impossible to evaluate on one test a student's true reading abilities, but his ability to accurately retell a story with descriptive language would be a valuable life skill (Krechevsky, 1991).

The state Language Arts Framework adopted in 1989 changed what and how literacy programs were taught. Winbury and Evans (1990) commented that it forced a reconsideration of evaluation techniques for student performance. Goodman

(1989) perceived evaluation as a continuous, ongoing, integral process which does not restrict student learning.

Recent and significant changes in the view of reading instruction and curricula now acknowledged reading and writing as dynamic, interactive processes rather than a collection of skills. Children's literacy development was currently dominated by assessment techniques which limited the student's ability to prove his competency level (Johnston, 1987). To improve the literacy curriculum a change in assessment was inevitable.

Standardized test results were often too general to give educators any real help in instructional planning. Educators made daily decisions concerning programs for the classroom without adequate data relevant to the specific learning needs of the pupils involved. Continually updated student information would be a great benefit in teacher planning efforts. Mathews (1990) suggested basing assessment on a positive model with emphasis on what the child already knows. Such an approach identifies a child's areas of strength so that appropriate experiences may be provided to build on that success (Krechevsky, 1991).

The opportunity for children to learn and for teachers to assess what is being learned are two activities blending naturally together in the classroom setting. The teaching role continues to be that of a diagnostician actively

observing individual students as well as the total class in ever-changing situations day by day (Galindo, 1989).

Standardized assessment procedures, according to Wolf, (1989) "teach students that assessment is not a personal responsibility, that performance on limited areas of the curriculum are more important than knowledge and application of skills, and that achievement is more highly valued than one's development" (p. 35-36). The reason this input is potentially destructive to learners is that whatever is tested is considered of value (Crowley, 1989). Therefore, the content and format of tests have shaped instruction (Shepard, 1989).

Johnston (1987) added, "There is a place for the more intrusive norm referenced, product oriented approach but it is a small one, certainly much smaller than the pretentious position it currently occupies" (p. 748). Historically, a greater emphasis has been placed on state mandated student achievement tests, yet educators have come to place more value on informal classroom assessments which offer clearer, continuous monitoring of student progress in literacy development.

If learners must construct their own knowledge by interrelating a myriad pool of facts, experiences and concepts, then it becomes evident that isolated skills are

meaningless. According to Shepard (1989), "Real learning cannot be spoon-fed, one skill at a time" (p. 6).

There were many differences noted between standardized tests and multiple choice tests, but all good tests have pre-established criteria or standards. Obviously without predetermined criteria, it would be impossible to establish a baseline, monitor progress, or determine how to proceed with instruction (Valencia, 1990b). With clear objectives Valencia asserted, "(educators) can uphold standards without enforcing standardization" (p. 61). According to Wiggins (1989), one administrative concern is to adequately communicate school goals to the community. This could eventually lead to the diminished importance of standardized tests making them less necessary.

Rief (1990) said that learning to read and write was not objective even though our evaluation systems indicate otherwise. Teachers need to keep students reading and writing as independent learners, to gain realistic evidence of their wide range of knowledge.

Many educational objectives are not easily monitored by traditional paper and pencil methods. Tyler (1949) commented that evaluation should not be misconstrued as any two or three consistent assessment techniques. Educators are aware of a wide scope of appropriate and valid forms of assessment, but traditional habits of teaching and testing

are hard to change (Wiggins, 1987). Finding or developing instruments which would better indicate the widest range of academic achievement and be useful in guiding the teaching-learning process remains a true challenge for educators (Frederiksen, 1984; Tindel & Marston, 1990).

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The specific goal of this practicum was to use appropriate assessment procedures in the writer's third grade classroom, for monitoring reading and writing development which involved individual students and their parents in order to better meet the academic and humanistic goals of education.

Behavioral Objectives

The specific objectives were the following:

Objective 1 The writer would implement six authentic assessment techniques during September to monitor individual reading and writing abilities within her classroom, as evidenced by student records.

Objective 2 All the students in the writer's class would be involved in continuous self-assessment of reading and writing development through regular teacher-student conferences and written comments as evidenced by a classroom conference calendar and observations by peer teachers.

Objective 3 All parents of students in the class would be invited to participate in the assessment of their own child's literacy development, and the parents of at least 15 of the students would be actively involved during the first reporting period. Evidence of these activities were to be verified through written responses from parents, and a calendar schedule of parent conferences.

Objective 4 Each student would develop personal Writing Portfolios during the year and select a minimum of two samples of his best written work for inclusion in his portfolio by the end of each marking period. In addition, each student would compose a letter explaining his criteria for selecting his own work. This letter was to be included in the Writing Portfolio during the first marking period.

Measurement of Objectives

The objectives were to be measured using a variety of methods. The student folders containing assessment tools of reading and writing development would provide evidence of implementation of the first objective.

A class roster with conference dates would verify regular teacher-student conferences designated by objective two. Student writing folders would contain a written record of conference comments.

Verification of objective three would be met with a calendar of parent conferences for the first reporting period. The writer would maintain notes on conference comments.

Individual student Writing Portfolios containing three or four student-selected writing samples with a cover letter would be assembled by November, and further developed by the second reporting period proving attainment of objective four.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

In order to note any atypical event during the implementation of this practicum, the writer kept a journal and recorded any deviations from the expected goals and objectives. Such monitoring kept the writer focused during the project and prevented any obstacle from interfering with the culmination of the practicum.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The problem to be addressed was the selection and implementation of appropriate classroom assessment techniques to provide diagnostic and prescriptive information on literacy development to parents, students and teachers. In the search for authentic assessments which offer more immediate feedback and reflect specific evidence of learning, research points to a variety of possible alternatives.

Strickland and Morrow (1989) contended that through informal assessments such as observation, recording anecdotes, reviewing performance samples, and interviewing, teachers can effectively monitor students' emergent reading abilities. Many of these techniques are being implemented

successfully and receiving popular publicity (Bird, 1989; Clay, 1990).

Graves (1983) listed a variety of types of classroom observations, such as "Folder observation (with an individual conference), Distant observation (during writing time), Close-in observation (how the child actually composes), and Participant observation (ask probing questions)" (p. 286). Student observation has been a time honored approach to informal evaluation.

Educators speak often of starting where a child is. Bissex (1980) commented, "There is no other place the child can start from. There are only other places the teacher can start from" (p. 111). If teacher and student are to begin at the same point, then the teacher must first determine what the child can do rather than stress what he cannot do (Clay, 1990). This leads to a close observation of each student as well as a critical view of the class as a whole. Only teachers can make detailed observations which demonstrate academic growth over time.

Bird (1989) noted that it is observation which links theory to practice. Monthly writing samples could facilitate observations through student-teacher conferences. A teacher must be able to step back from instruction in order to be an effective observer. During classroom conference time, it is necessary to have small blocks of

uninterrupted time to meet with students. Notes from the conference or a simple checklist would suffice as a brief written record of the interaction. Both the writing sample and the note would be added to the student's writing folder. (Bird, 1989) Some teachers use the self-sticking note pads to record brief observations or leave encouraging notes for students.

Bissex (1980) noted, "Observation of personal and developmental characteristics is a crucial part of the teacher's function in helping children to progress in writing when writing is viewed as a meaning-making and conveying process, not a skills exercise" (p. 111). Conferencing gives direct feedback related to instruction and may therefore be the most powerful aspect of the process of evaluation (Goodman, 1990).

When the teacher meets and confers with individual students to discuss the writing process, the format and topics included in the conference should be predictable to the child and focused by the teacher. Rather than tell the student what to do, this is the opportunity for the teacher to elicit creative solutions. Students should be encouraged to ask questions to clarify information and demonstrate their understanding. The vocabulary used in the conference should be specific and understood by both participants (Graves, 1983).

One criteria many researchers agree on is the importance of giving specific guidance to students rather than stock phrases such as 'how interesting' which lead nowhere (Bussis, 1970). When teachers circulate through the classroom during reading and writing activities, engaging students in brief dialogues about work in progress, specific and positive input can be given.

There are many elements which contribute to student success in reading and writing. The environment plays a crucial role. Each student acquires these skills in a unique and individual manner in differing environments. Bussis and Chittenden (1970) noted the importance of providing an environment in which students will have something to say; a print-rich classroom to encourage reading; sufficient resources to challenge students to research their special interest areas; and opportunities to work together to become effective problem solvers.

It is evident that students are as concerned as their teachers about how their classroom is arranged and run. If a major goal is to achieve self evaluation and self control by students, the classroom must offer an environment which facilitates self direction. Primary grade students can begin to learn the value of self actualization when it is effectively modeled in the classroom (Goodman, cited in Loughlin & Martin, 1987; Rief, 1990). Clay (1990) noted,

"Help is given but independence is expected so that self-evaluation by the student emerges" (p. 291).

In the area of literacy development, teachers strive to help young readers gain understanding from printed text. Clay (1990) pointed out the importance of linking the child's prior knowledge to what he reads in order for him to more fully understand new material being presented. Discussing what is read, predicting outcomes, and relating other classroom learning and tasks to the readings can assist the teacher in evaluating student progress.

It was cogently noted by Loughlin and Martin (1987) that literacy development is not limited by a given set of competencies nor by purpose as the reading process continues to expand throughout life. Therefore, it is important for teachers to instill this concept by relating learning tasks to real life situations. Wiggins (1989a) refers to authentic assessments as those tasks which simulate life skills requiring students to design, to write, or to perform activities. The challenge of authentic assessment is accommodation of individual student's learning aptitudes, styles and interests.

Wiggins (1989a) further described authentic assessment as, "contextualized, complex intellectual challenges, not fragmented and static bits or tasks...they stress depth more than breadth...and exist in harmony with

school wide aims; they embody standards to which everyone.. ...can aspire" (p. 711).

Baskwill and Whitman (1988) suggested that teachers create a learning profile on each student early in the school year as an aid in determining those skills and concepts the children already know in order to individualize further development. Such evaluation could be of a cumulative and longitudinal nature and follow the children throughout the year or perhaps even longer. Included in the profile might be interest inventories. Hedges and Kane (1968) noted that offering school experiences connected to special interest areas of the students, can best preserve and enhance their own identities.

Greaney (1980) suggested that students keep diaries indicating how they spend leisure time, as a source for writing ideas.

When students are writing, samples may be dated and saved in a writing folder. Baskwill and Whitman (1988) suggested asking the children to show you all they know how to do when they write, so they will include the conventions of writing they are capable of, and use inventive spelling. Among the many ways to evaluate student writing include, holistic, analytical, primary trait, mechanical and grammatical, as well as teacher-unit analysis. Assessment approaches may be direct or indirect.

Holistic scoring reviews a paper for an overall impression. Some teachers apply the holistic scoring process to each of the five components of writing: sentence structure, content, vocabulary, development, and conventions (Flood & Lapp, 1989).

Graves (1983) suggested that students orally present written work for the class to receive through listening, commenting, and questioning. Holistic evaluation could be applied here as the format concentrates on content and ideas rather than merely mechanics.

Analytic scoring involves isolating and scoring one or more characteristic of writing. The latter method is preferred when conventions of writing such as punctuation, syntax or sense of audience is the focus (Wolf, 1989). According to Flood and Lapp (1989) many teachers select analytic scoring techniques to gain needed information useful in guiding instruction.

Many issues need to be addressed when establishing a portfolio system. Vavrus (1990) observed that it is important to determine the audience, identify what aspects of learning could best be evidenced through this method, ascertain weather works in progress or only finished products are to be included, and decide who chooses work to include, before considering what to actually include in the portfolios. Valencia (1990a) stated, "While the flexibility

of the portfolio is one of its greatest assets, it may also be one of its greatest problems" (p.339).

Farr (cited in Jogsma, 1989) believed critical thinking involved in decisions about one's portfolio to be almost as important as the work it contains. Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) declared that by interweaving instruction and assessment, the portfolio approach encourages individual students to be assertive in their own learning program design. Mitchell (1990) noted that Vermont now includes portfolio work in their state assessment program.

Rothman (1990) referred to portfolio assessment as ambitious and innovative. Some teachers have maintained student writing folders with writing samples. The portfolio approach suggests the possibility of using both systems, allowing students to select their best works to go into the portfolio (Rief, 1990). Jogsma (1989) referred to an elementary school which includes parent observations about their child's literary development. This would be one means of demonstrating to parents the value of their input. Classroom teachers ultimately make most of the decisions regarding curriculum and evaluation (Baskwill & Whitman, 1988). Some teachers use the reciprocal teaching method to get more observations of student performance. This may also include input from classroom aides.

Writing assessments are an excellent example of learning-like tests. Shepard (1989) commented that by not overemphasizing language mechanics the test itself can represent important learning as it is experience in testing. As Wiggins (1987) pointed out, authentic tests are worth practicing and retaking because we become better educated through this recurring process.

When writing samples are used to assess student skills, criteria and performance standards must be pre-established. Persons who score student essays need special training. Many teachers are against packaged performance assessments preferring tests which involve teachers in the scoring (Wiggins, 1990).

Haney (1985) warned that no single testing technique is best. He stressed the need to involve students, teachers and parents in testing ideas and expectations about teaching and learning.

One positive goal of implementing appropriate and authentic assessments is to recognize student success as it occurs. Tindel and Marston (1990) wrote that documentation of success in the classroom is the most important part of the assessment process. They advocate teachers drawing from curricula and their instruction to create assessment tasks. Existing problems of measurement should direct new strategies. Tindel and Marston (1990) noted that current

practice focuses primarily on instruction and emphasizes end-point assessment.

Some teachers become learners with their students by reading when they read and writing when they write, then sharing both with the class. They use their own writing process as a model for the students to emulate (Rief, 1990).

Description of Selected Solutions

It was the writer's opinion that many of the strategies extrapolated from the interdisciplinary literature could possibly provide a wider range of performance based evaluations while involving parents and students in self-assessment. To best meet the needs of third grade students, the writer selected the following techniques to implement.

Objective one was to employ several authentic assessment techniques. The writer discussed assessment with the class, explained why tests were needed and what teachers did with the results. Over a period of three weeks, she presented twelve performance based assessment techniques which she referred to as projects. Pupils selected projects to do and decided whether to work alone or with peers.

Early in the school year, the writer developed a writing folder format adapting suggestions from Graves' book. Forms were affixed to the four sides of a legal sized

file folder to record salient information about a student's emerging literacy. On one side the student jotted down topics of personal interest, areas of expertise and whom he wanted to work with during cooperative work sessions. On another side, the teacher noted the student's writing abilities and goals selected by the student during individual conferences. In the space remaining, the student recorded stories, books and poems he had written, and books he had read.

The next step was to organize an accessible place to store the folders in the classroom. The writer placed two plastic file boxes on a low shelf at the side of the room. Inside were hanging files in alphabetical order. One box was designated for boys' folders and one for girls' folders. Two boxes facilitated retrieval and filing of the folders. During the first week of school, students began to write on these folders and used them continuously to organize their written work.

Objective one was fulfilled with the implementation of the assessment projects and the development of student record keeping techniques.

The involvement of all the students in on-going self-assessment was objective number two. Using a series of writing rubrics, students learned to evaluate their own work against established criteria. (See Appendix B). The writer

determined which rubric was appropriate for each student. As the student's writing proficiency developed, a more advanced rubric was employed.

The student reviewed the rubric and sought evidence of specific criteria in his writing, for example, ending punctuation. When he could show evidence of the skill, the teacher checked that item off the list. The teacher would ask the student which skills not checked off he intended to work on and those became his short-term goal. To conclude the interview, the child was usually asked what he thought he would do next.

Students referred to their writing folders almost daily. Inside were a self-generated list of topics to write about, incomplete work to be continued, as well as completed work which could be rewritten, providing a constant source of writing opportunities. Between conferences, students continued or revised written assignments using their personalized checklists as a guide for improvement. Posted on classroom charts were project ideas, editing procedures, and the steps of the writing process.

Pupils were encouraged to reread their own work checking for completeness and errors and to ask a classmate to edit their work. The students' need or desire to rewrite work was quite inconsistent. Understandably, not all work was rewritten even if it needed to be. However, work of

greatest interest to the student sometimes was revised several times revealing application of the writing process.

Scaffold conferences, as depicted by Graves, are characterized by their predictable sequence, limited focus, solution demonstrations, student driven format, and common language for writing discussions. Individual conferences were initiated and the classroom aide was trained in scaffold conference techniques. By the second month of school, a back-to-back reading program serving first and second graders revised instructional aide schedules and greatly reduced their time for classroom assistance. Thus, the aide was no longer able to participate in scaffold conferences which had to be held during class time within the classroom. Time was limited for such one-to-one activity as the other students were young enough to still need much guidance from the teacher and could not be expected to be gainfully involved in other meaningful activities for very long without the teacher.

During initial scaffold conferences, the writer used small self-sticking note pads to record a brief summary of the interview. The note was affixed inside the student folder and later rewritten on the skills section. The folders were in frequent use with students manipulating the papers inside, causing some of the notes to slip out. The

writer soon found it easier to eliminate that step and write directly on the student folder during the conference.

For those students requiring more help, the conference revealed his specific needs. The teacher could abandon mechanics, record dictated ideas and launch the student into a writing project. Sitting beside the student, the teacher conveyed a supportive message. Once the active listening mode was established, it was important to follow the child's lead and give him full attention. When other students interrupted, the teacher maintained dialogue and eye contact with the conferee. Ignoring interruptions usually spurred the other students to solve problems by themselves or to redirect themselves until the teacher was available again.

As students became familiar with scaffold conferences, they were active leaders in discussing their work. They learned to identify their attained skills. Those skills listed on the file as a goal would be transferred to the Skills Attained section when consistently in evidence in the student's work. When the skill was inconsistent, it was harder for the student to perceive the inconsistency.

Spelling instruction in this classroom combined a holistic language approach with useful words. The class participated in creating weekly spelling sentences incorporating high frequency vocabulary. Students studied and wrote the words in context. Each student had a word

list booklet in his desk with space to add other words he needed. Picture dictionaries and a selection of library books were available on low shelves. These efforts combined to facilitate the reading and writing processes while encouraging independence and self pacing.

Most of the students learned to use word lists and picture dictionaries as spelling references. Those few students inhibited by frequent problems in spelling or handwriting, or immobilized by the obstacle of a blank page, often left their desks to wander or distract others. They were at a developmental stage where they needed more teacher direction in getting started and encouragement to stay with a task. Peers were unable to fill the void created when the teacher was not available. Two children were isolates frequently involved in nonacademic activities or negative behaviors. For them, increased teacher direction was needed throughout the school day. It was difficult for some students to remember not to interrupt a conference, and classroom management systems aided in this regard.

The writer taught the steps of the writing process, introduced editing skills, encouraged rewriting to improve and polish written work, modeled writing in the four domains and honored writing by displaying student work frequently in the classroom. A large bulletin board was divided into sections and a space was designated for each student to

display written work. Students collated their rough copy, the rewritten work and the checklist together and either filed them or posted them on the student work bulletin board. Students rotated their own work on display and often had several writing samples displayed simultaneously.

At the beginning of the school year, the staff decided to implement a new report card being piloted at some schools in the district. The writer explained the system to the students. A set of report card criteria for designations one through six was listed for student performance in reading and in writing. (See Appendixes C and D)

The teacher synthesized the writing criteria on charts and displayed them in the classroom. (See Appendix E) Group writing projects were sometimes rated during a class discussion according to evidence matching the charts. The class would give suggestions on what would be needed to revise a writing for a higher score. The writer copied off the small paragraph blurbs explaining the points and sometimes affixed one to student written work sent home.

The criteria for reading were shared during student conferences on reading. Students set individual goals for the year concerning writing and reading development.

Another area to be addressed was that of presenting student written work orally and having it received by classmates with positive suggestions and comments. (See

Appendix F) Each day two or more students read one of their writings before the class. Other students received it by giving comments or asking questions about the piece. The teacher facilitated the discussion and modeled receiving behavior.

For objective three, parents were to be involved in assessing their student's literacy development. This was accomplished through conferences, a series of letters, and a pre and post survey.

At Back-To-School Night, the writer discussed with parents the importance of reading and writing as lifetime processes having wide application. Suggestions were given for encouraging both processes at home. (See Appendix G) The print rich environment advocated by Bussis and Chittenden was reinforced by the writer for the home and modeled in the classroom.

The writer initiated biweekly parent letters sent home with samples of student work. Parents retained the student work, then signed and returned the letter, with comments, providing a vehicle for ongoing home-school communications.

It was deemed important to give an overview of what the writer's study was about, how these techniques would be helpful to each child's literacy development, as well as why and how students and parents would be involved in meaningful assessment procedures. All these issues were addressed in

the classroom with students and during conferences with parents.

During parent conferences following the first reporting period, the writer shared the student's individual goals for reading and writing, and further explained the new report cards. Parent goals for their children were also discussed. Parents responded to an initial survey about educational priorities for their children and reporting preferences. (See Appendix H) In the spring, parents completed a post survey concerning reporting methods. (See Appendix I)

The writer gained familiarity with the new reporting criteria by participating in a district portfolio assessment workshop. Teachers met by grade levels to discuss writing rubrics and to evaluate anchor papers. The need for giving students specific writing directions and for scoring objectively were strongly reinforced. The exercise was helpful in gaining experience with new assessment techniques.

Fulfilling objective four involved the development of student Writing Portfolios. During the third month of school, the class created artistic folders which were laminated and arranged alphabetically in a third classroom file box. After learning the difference between the writing folders and the Writing Portfolios, students were instructed how each were to be used.

The writer correlated the writing activities from the literature text to the writing domains. This reference was used when selecting assignments or supplementing the curriculum units to insure the four domains of writing were incorporated into instruction.

To identify the domains of writing covered during the school year, the writer devised a color coding system. Red dots identified the narrative, imaginative domain; green dots were put on all analytical, expository work; blue dots designated sensory, descriptive writing; and orange dots were for the practical, informative domain. After categorizing the writing assignments for the students, they were directed to affix a colored peel-and-stick dot to the front of each writing sample in the writing folder. While considering their own goals for writing, students were asked to select four pieces of work, one with each of the four different colored dots. These were transferred from the writing folders to the Writing Portfolios. In addition, the student composed a letter explaining why he selected these pieces and included the letter in his Writing Portfolio.

During the ensuing reporting periods, students repeated the procedure for selecting and adding further works to the Writing Portfolios. As Tierney, Carter and Desai (1991) noted, children reflect a personal perspective rather than an adult standard when selecting and evaluating schoolwork.

This added a refreshing approach to the formulation of the portfolio. Those parents who participated in a conference saw the portfolio work for his own child and when relevant, viewed other student samples without names in order to observe concrete examples of the criteria being used for evaluation.

A cassette tape of each child's oral reading was made in October, January and April. These were included in the portfolios and used during parent conferences.

Calendar Plan

To achieve the stated goal, the writer followed this implementation calendar:

Month 1

* Participate in a four-week California Literature Project to develop skills in using authentic assessment measures.
* Train classroom aide to assist with student teacher scaffolding conferences.
* Attend a district portfolio assessment workshop.

Month 2

* At conference time, share with parents techniques they may use to encourage reading and writing development.

* Network with peers regarding possible authentic assessment measures.
* Discuss practicum proposal with site principal.
* Plan a staff development presentation on alternative assessment techniques sharing information from the California Literature Project.

Month 3

* Conduct parent pre survey.
* Devise systems for monitoring and recording literacy development.
* Facilitate the establishment of student folders.
* Work on establishing a print-rich room environment with optimal resources to facilitate independent reading and writing activities.
* Present monitoring systems to students.
* At Back-To-School Night, share the Practicum project and objectives with parents. Enlist help of parent classroom volunteers.

Month 4

* Develop conference routine.
* Conduct initial parent conferences to involve them in goal setting for the year. Discuss evaluation techniques.
* Share handout on ideas for parents to encourage reading and writing at home.

* Review both types of student folders (literacy and writing portfolios) to determine if students need help understanding how, why, and when to use each.

Month 5

* Continue to implement observations and conferences with individual students.
* Communicate to parents the systems being implemented to monitor literacy development.
* Present staff in-service on authentic assessment methods.
* Initiate peer observations (teacher to teacher) to obtain feedback regarding teacher-student observations and monitoring of new systems.
* Submit Practicum Progress Report
* Invite all parents to participate in conferences with students to become involved in continuous evaluation of literacy development.
* Meet with verifier to share implementation progress.
* Review with parents the student work folders to show increasing self-evaluation by students, to indicate skills already attained, and to share individual student goals.

Month 6

* Continue peer observations.
* Continue teacher-student conferences.

* Share implementation techniques at State Literature Project meeting for peer input.
* Present staff development program on authentic assessment and scaffold conferences.

Month 7

* Discuss with students the effects of the new methods. Make adjustments as needed.
* Attend state reading conference to exchange ideas on authentic assessment related to literacy.
* Review student literacy work folders and writing portfolios to note student progress and determine degree of student and parent involvement.

Month 8

* Meet with verifier for input.
* Conduct parent post survey and collate responses.
* Record results of practicum implementation.
* Disseminate practicum information as predetermined.

Collecting student work samples, maintaining student work folders, observing students at work on reading and writing tasks, and monitoring student progress on literacy processes continued throughout the school year. Conferences with students and their parents were scheduled whenever appropriate.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The practicum goal to implement appropriate reading and writing assessment procedures in the writer's third grade classroom was achieved. All of the objectives of the practicum were completed. The results indicated that young students are capable of assuming a greater leadership role in selecting appropriate learning activities and performing a range of authentic assessment tasks.

The authentic assessment techniques specified by objective one were presented as projects which students could choose among. The activities were recorded in student work folders as evidence of attainment. The writer had wanted students to participate in maintaining these records but found it too difficult a task for most children of this age group. Sometimes parent volunteers were able to assist with this informal record keeping.

Projects incorporated a variety of real life skills such as reading, planning, designing, performing, creating, summarizing, writing and working as a team. Such activities combined with performance criteria qualify as examples of

authentic assessment according to Wiggins (1990). Allowing students to select projects helped meet individual interests and abilities while increasing the opportunities for success as Haney (1985) advocated.

The teacher-student conferences proposed in objective two, were held continuously whenever students were involved in activities needing little direct teacher supervision. A few scaffold conferences were held almost daily with each student participating in a conference twice monthly. The writer maintained a conference calendar to assure that each student was included in the monthly schedule. The length of time spent in a conference was flexible according to the needs of the student. Lower functioning students needed longer to learn what was expected of him in the conference and slower to assume the leadership role. More advanced students were immediately ready to share their comments about work in progress and next steps. Several fellow teachers observed the conference process and gave feedback to the writer concerning the atmosphere of the exchange, the degree of student leadership, and the quality of communications.

To involve parents in the assessment program as indicated by objective three, the writer invited parents to participate in individual conferences three times during the school year and maintained a calendar of these interviews.

The first conference focused on the goal of the practicum and the concept of authentic assessment, with parents setting goals for their children for the year. Additional information was shared at the Back-to-School presentation. The second conference centered on the first report card and parent concerns. Spring Open House offered another opportunity to keep parents informed about the progress of the classroom project and to exchange information. The third conference highlighted individual student progress related to goals preset by parents and students. In addition, other conferences were held sporadically as needed focusing more on student discipline rather than academic concerns. Regular communication between school and home was maintained through weekly newsletters initiated by the writer and inviting parent response.

The fourth objective, to develop Writing Portfolios with representative student work, was accomplished in a timely manner with additional samples being selected by the student and included within each grading period. This work will be given to the parent in the fall semester after the child's next teacher has reviewed them.

The writer often followed the suggestion of Baskwill and Whitman (1988) by directing students to show all their writing skills in an assignment so the usual conventions of

writing would be in evidence. It proved to be a motivation for students to want to demonstrate their best skills.

The writer concurred with Bussis and Chittenden (1970) regarding the importance of providing sufficient resources to promote emerging literacy processes and the advantages of cooperative learning opportunities. Both strategies offered students more learning choices and were accepted positively by the parents and the pupils.

Self assessment approaches made students share the responsibility for their own learning as advocated by both Rief (1990) and Goodman (1989).

Involving parents in assessment allowed them to view their own children as learners from a more objective perspective and offered a clearer vision of the grade level curriculum and objectives. Many parents expressed their wonder that instruction and evaluation were not this focused and clear when they were students. Parents and students both reported they learned specifically about areas needing to be addressed as reading and writing proficiency developed. Parents and students came to view reading and writing as processes rather than simply a group of skills, a concept stressed by Bissex (1980) and shared by the writer.

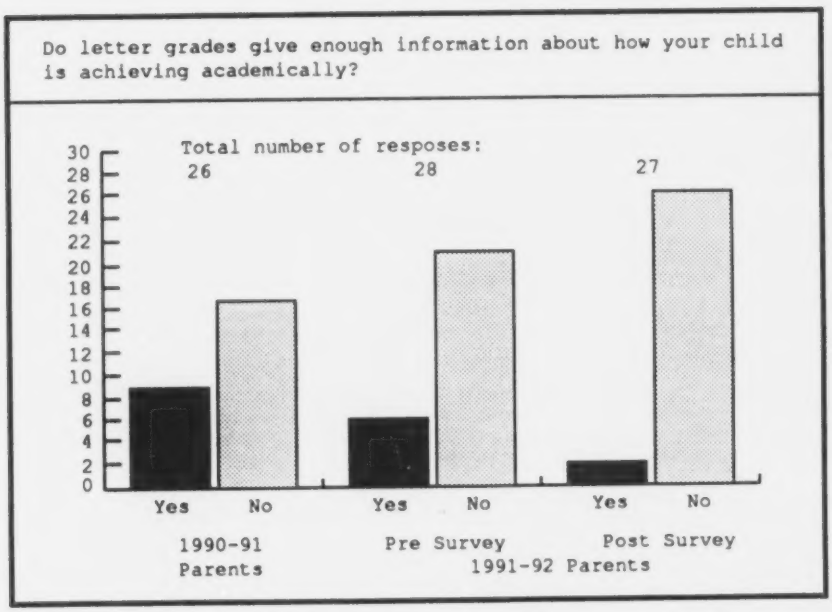
A written survey was implemented twice with parents. The pre survey asked parents to prioritize goals for their

child for the year, and to compare the effectiveness of traditional report cards with conferences in reporting student progress. The post survey only sought input regarding the reporting system in order to note any changes in parental attitudes during the school year. The post survey had also been used with parents of two third grade classes in the preceding year.

When asked if letter grades on report cards adequately reported student achievement, six parents responding to the pre survey and two responding to the post survey indicated "yes", while nine parents responded "yes" last year. The number of parents desiring more than simply letter grades increased with each survey. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1

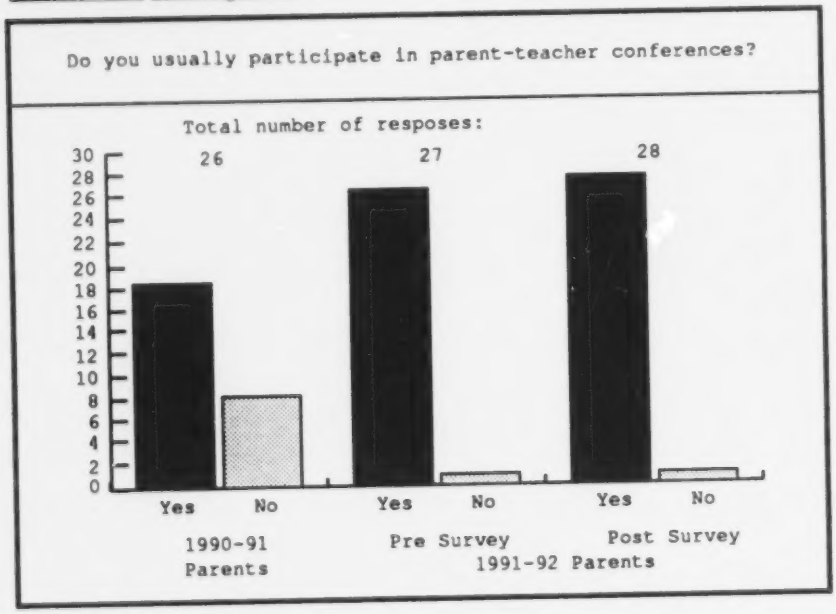
Effectiveness of Report Cards for Reporting Progress



The next item on the survey indicated how many parents were usually involved in parent-teacher conferences. Among last year's parents 18 out of 26 responded affirmatively. The pre survey this year showed 26 of 27 parents usually participating in conferences and 27 of 28 actually being involved in conferences. Only one parent did not participate in a conference this year. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2

Conference Participation



The next item on the survey showed the frequency of conferences and the usual mode for the discussion. All the parents began this year with a conference, three by phone and the rest in person. The post survey indicated only three parents participating in one conference this year with the others indicating two or more conferences this year conducted primarily in person. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Frequency and Mode of Conferences

If you participate in parent-teacher conferences, how frequently are the conferences? What is the mode of the conference?			
Total number of responses:	26	27	28
none	3	0	0
once	9	2	53
twice	9	2	11
three times	2	0	8
four times	0	0	6
	In person 16 phone 8	In person 24 phone 3	In person 24 phone 4
	1990-91 Parents	Pre Survey 1991-92 Parents	Post Survey

The initial conference was essentially teacher directed, while the direction of the report card conferences were more equally shared. The Writing Portfolios generated much discussion of individual student academic growth. The writing folder offered a wider range of writing samples as well as scaffold conference notes and lists of student goals and accomplishments.

In the survey parents were asked their opinions about conference effectiveness. While four parents responding to the survey last year considered conferences unnecessary, all the parents this year indicated they were in varying degrees helpful. By the end of the year, the post survey responses showed 25 parents considered conferences very helpful in learning about student achievement. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Effectiveness of Conferences

What is your opinion of parent-teacher conferences to discuss academic progress?			
Total number of responses:	26	27	28
Unnecessary	4	0	0
Can be helpful	11	8	3
Usually very helpful	11	11	25
	1990-91 Parents	Pre Survey 1991-92 Parents	Post Survey

Due to a turnover of students during the school year, one more parent responded to the post survey than to the pre survey. A few parental responses were not included in the survey because of the short length of time their children were enrolled in the program.

The overall result of the survey indicated parents valued the conference mode of reporting and increased their participation in conferences as they became more involved in the evaluation process. Ultimately, both parents and pupils were more informed about student progress.

Initially, the difficulty anticipated by the writer in implementing authentic assessment techniques would be the conversion of student performance into a letter grade. This task was facilitated in two ways. First, the newly adopted report card eliminated letter grades and substituted a numerical system with pre-determined performance criteria. Second, the writer made greater use of prompts and rubrics which provided the students with specific expectations for style, content, organization, and mechanics. Such standards, Wiggins (1987) pointed out, are as necessary to student success as repeated practice before testing.

The writer employed two of Graves' (1983) observation techniques. One was to conference on folder observations. The other technique was participant observation while students presented and received one another's work orally.

Utilizing a formatted writing folder helped the student to organize and store his work. This tool was crucial to the scaffold conference and, as Graves (1983) pointed out, also provided a summary of information for frequent quick review. The writer applied either primary trait or analytical analysis directly when discussing student work. The writing samples from the student folders individualized the conferences to meet the child's specific learning needs.

The thrust of the scaffold conferences was to emphasize and acknowledge the child's capabilities which Clay (1990) denotes as a motivational force in the writing process. The teacher often saw many mistakes but didn't attack them. When the student mentioned a conventional error, then it would be discussed. After one or more rewrites, there were usually still several errors but the work showed evidence of improvements. Asking the child how he did something clarified his learning processes. Critical thinking required the student to apply his learning.

A review of the scaffold conference schedule indicated that scaffold conferences were held quite consistently with each student participating about twice monthly. There were periods of time when the academic schedule was changed for special programs or testing making conferences impossible. However, students were still able to continue the development of literacy processes by reading and writing

daily. At one point, the writer tried conferencing with two or three students simultaneously. Instead of an in-depth discussion led by one student concerning his work, all students wanted to share. This changed the focus of the exchange and produced fragmentation. Individual conferences were soon resumed.

The writer discovered scaffold conferences to be a challenge with the teacher and student in reversed leader-follower roles. The writer thought that stepping back to assume an active listening and guidance role would be easy, but for an activist it was actually very difficult. Asking process questions helped the student develop self-awareness as a writer, but also required the teacher to patiently wait for answers.

Graves (1983) noted that students learn from experience the teacher will usually wait about five seconds after a question for a response. When a student hesitates, the teacher traditionally takes over. In a scaffold conference, Graves (1983) said it takes a while to become accustomed to silence, allowing each student to think and respond in a self directed manner. The writer concurred and found it difficult to wait while preoccupied with the needs of all the students and the desire to press on to complete the conference. Substituting the impulse to dispense information with simply waiting quietly is, according to

Graves, more deliberate than natural. The student became accustomed to the waiting period and learned that nothing would happen until he responded. Graves (1983) found periods of 15 to 45 seconds of wait time quite common. The writer had a similar experience, with the response time decreasing as the student became aware that the teacher would expect and wait for his input. The student learned to articulate his goals and to explain his progress with his projects.

As scaffold conferences were implemented, most of the students gained confidence in their leadership role and led the interview. Graves (1983) was in favor of students playing the key role with the teacher guiding, questioning and listening so that students would seek solutions to learning problems. The writer found this approach to work successfully with most of the class.

Tierney, Carter and Desai (1991) commented that the subtle art of teaching values the child's contribution but guides the conversation to address areas of need. Review of conference records helped the writer determine which students were in need of assistance through a conference or reteaching. It was Bissex (1980) who reminded us that the children can only begin to learn at their functioning level. The learning profile suggested by Baskwill and Whitman (1988) was essentially the writing folder as it contained

individual information about student interests and experiences which could be included in conference discussions.

The conference vocabulary facilitated the interview as students became comfortable using terms such as topic, paragraph, setting, voice, audience, show-not-tell, compare, contrast, develop, describe, ending and edit. Using a rubric to analyze their own work, they looked for evidence of specific criteria to discuss. Documenting the evidence in the student folder did indeed validate student success as noted by Tindel and Marston (1990). A record was made of every conference as Bird (1989) suggested, but record keeping was kept simple.

Participant observations involved students in peer presentations and critiques. The writer applied holistic analysis indirectly to the oral presentations. Students developed experience speaking orally before the class, listening critically, and offering constructive comments. Oral presentations focused the listeners on content, style, sequence, and voice rather than on routine mechanics of writing. The writer acknowledged this to be a powerful step in the evaluation process as indicated by Goodman (1989) because of the direct feedback.

A record was kept of these student oral presentations. helping to assure that all students had repeated

opportunities to present and to receive writings. Usually students were asked to voluntarily present, but sometimes the teacher called upon certain students to insure their participation. Although a few students seldom volunteered, they all participated when called upon. Sometimes a student would preface his reading by stating it was incomplete. Then peer suggestions often provided the stimulus to continue the writing.

The interdisciplinary research enumerated a host of practical theories. Observing those strategies during implementation linked theory and practice as Bird (1989) predicted. Discussing the process, labeled the learning for students.

During the initial parent conference, the writer discussed the importance of the emergence and development of reading and writing proficiency throughout life as noted by Loughlin and Martin (1987). Parents completed a survey concerning their preferences regarding report cards and conferences as well as their expectations for their children. Haney (1985) wrote that parents, students and teachers should all be involved in setting expectations about teaching and learning. The writer found parents and students willing and interested in participating in this process. With pre-determined performance based criteria, objective evaluation was clearer and more consistent.

The writer's staff decided that student portfolios would contain unedited work, cover the four writing domains, and be accessible in the classroom for the principal to peruse periodically. This meshed with the writer's plan to have students select at least two writing samples during each reporting period and to have portfolios always accessible to students and parents. Student selection of work was advocated by Rief (1990) and the writer found this to be a workable system for third graders.

Conclusions

The writer concluded that many significant learnings were accomplished through the implementation of this practicum.

Teachers struggle to meet the scope of educational needs reflected in a wide range of student abilities and diverse backgrounds. By empowering students to identify their own needs, they were better able to streach toward their capacities. Each student's learning evolved at an individual pace influenced by his past learning and experience, his culture, and learning style. Students became more responsible for their own learning through self assessment. Many students learned to first read through the prompt and the rubric completely to gain a better

understanding of the expectations before beginning an assignment.

Students achieved growth through the peer input process. They experienced the roles of both presenter and receiver of written work. The writer also sought opportunities beyond the classroom for these experiences. Visiting grandparents listened to presentations and read to the class. Multi-class read-around programs featured student writing. Students presented puppet shows with original scripts to other classes. Short plays were written and presented.

The writer observed students transfer their reading, writing and problem solving abilities to other curricular areas. When students saw themselves as published authors they valued the writing process and written products.

Parents learned to value the processes involved in literacy development. They valued the work of the student in a variety of domains over time by their positive acceptance of the portfolios as tangible, visual evidence of student growth. Parents, regardless of their own educational level, sought specific strategies and approaches to help support their children as learners.

The writer created a process oriented environment. She provided systematic interactions with students through scaffold conferences, and used the writing folders and

Writing Portfolios to focus the conferences. The writer, trained in the traditional teacher-directed classroom approach found success implementing other approaches such as self-directed study and a workshop environment.

Interfacing with adults outside the classroom, offered the writer support and objectivity during the study. Visitors to the classroom also were supportive with informal observations and comments on the classroom proceedings. As a participant in the State Literature Project, the writer networked with more teachers experimenting with alternative teaching and assessment strategies.

During scaffold conferences, the format was to start with what the student could do, thus offering positive and powerful reinforcement of learning. Allowing the student to set his own goals, placed value on his opinions. Recording both the goals and the attainments in his folder, allowed the student to refer to them whenever he desired.

The writer's findings concurred with those of Strickland and Morrow (1989) regarding the positiveness of informal assessments such as interviews and student performance samples for monitoring emergent reading and writing abilities. Such techniques are proving to be increasingly valuable in assisting teachers to adjust their teaching to match student needs. Two staff meetings focused on alternative assessment techniques, reinforced teacher

efforts to explore performance based assessment in literature as well as other curriculum areas. The exchange of ideas stimulated more teachers to consider authentic assessment as viable in guiding instruction to maximize learning experiences. The writer gained further understanding of her students and their learning approaches through a variety of observation techniques.

Recommendations

Cooperative learning played a significant role in facilitating project work and peer evaluations. It is recommended that this component be considered in authentic assessment and self assessment programs. Besides the limited time for one-to-one teacher conferences, students gain self-esteem by sharing their work with peers while learning to give positive feedback to others.

Some research in the field suggested that teachers become readers and writers with their students, reading when they read and writing when they write. The writer found this to be an impossible task given the age of the class. Young students require much guidance and constantly sought

teacher assistance during both reading and writing time. The literature period became the longest block of time available during the day for scaffold conferences. The writer believes that the peer helping mode of the cooperative learning environment was one key to controlling interruptions during conferences. Students were allowed to help each other and discuss one another's work. If this low hum of productive interaction were eliminated, the amount of time for writing and conferences would have had to be greatly reduced.

Portfolio assessment emphasizes process with the product, valuing student effort and improvement as learning goals are achieved. When the portfolio is seen as simply a collection of student work, it becomes limited in use. Grading portfolios can expand the scope of evaluation from just achievement to include the student's goals, effort and improvement. When the student interacts with his portfolio by reflecting, sharing and evaluating it, the portfolio becomes a self evaluation tool and the student is more likely to assume ownership of the portfolio.

One suggestion for a further study would be to compare the relationship between the purposes and uses of portfolios with student evaluation processes.

Dissemination

There have been several opportunities to date to share this practicum. They include the following:

* The writer presented techniques for scaffold conferences and ideas for involving students in the portfolio process at the State Literature Project.
* The writer gave input to the district Assessment Committee and to the school staff regarding parent conferences and methods used to help students and parents understand the new report cards.
* A summary of the practicum goals was published in the Portfolio News, a publication of the Portfolio Assessment Clearing House.
* The writer has been asked to be a presenter at two conferences on language arts and reading.
* Six other teachers on the staff observed the writer conducting individual scaffold conferences.
* The writer shared writing samples and portfolios at a district grade level meeting.
* At a recent Language Arts conference, the writer was invited to submit a section of the practicum for consideration as a chapter in a book regarding classroom assessment.

Further dissemination venues will be sought in the coming year.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER SURVEY CORRELATING STANDARDIZED TEST ITEMS TO CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Appendix A

Teacher Survey Correlating Standardized Test Items To Classroom Instruction

Please estimate to the best of your ability the number of test items found on your grade level Standardized Test which correlate to your actual classroom instruction following state frameworks and district subject matter curriculum guides. I recognize that the test is not available to make a specific comparison and your response will be based upon your memory of past test administrations. You need not sign the form but indicating your grade level would be helpful. Thank you.

I estimate that roughly _____ out of _____ Standardized Test items directly relate to our classroom instruction at _____ grade level.

APPENDIX B

RUBRIC SCORING SHEET

Appendix B

Rubric Scoring Sheet

Name: _____

Rubric Scoring for Rough Draft Yes= X		My Own Score	My Friend's Score	My Teacher's Score
__Did student write to the prompt?	(1)	___	___	___
__Are the sentences complete?	(1)	___	___	___
__Are ideas in correct sequence?	(1)	___	___	___
Did the student include sensory-descriptive details about:				
__the five senses (sound, smell)	(2)	___	___	___
__colors	(2)	___	___	___
__shapes and sizes	(2)	___	___	___
__locations	(2)	___	___	___
__contrast or comparisons	(4)	___	___	___
Is there variety in:				
__sentence beginnings	(2)	___	___	___
__sentence length	(2)	___	___	___
__word choices	(3)	___	___	___
Total Points		___	___	___

- - - -

APPENDIX C

REPORT CARD CRITERIA FOR READING

Appendix C

Report Card Criteria For Reading

6 EXCEPTIONAL READER
An enthusiastic, independent and reflective reader. Is capable of reading in all content areas and can read a wide range and variety of materials. Produces products that demonstrate comprehension even when drawn from multiple sources. Has critical awareness and can apply meaningful concepts to situations in his/her own life.

5 STRONG READER
A confident, independent reader who may pursue his/her own reading interests. Capable of reading in all the content areas, can read a wide range and variety of materials. Almost produces products that demonstrate comprehension, is developing critical awareness and can apply meaningful concepts to situations in his/her own life.

4 COMPETENT READER
A confident reader who may pursue his/her reading independently. Capable of reading in most content areas. May need help with unfamiliar or reference materials. Usually produces products that demonstrate comprehension, is developing some critical awareness and can apply meaningful concepts to situations in his/her own life.

3 DEVELOPING READER
A reader who is developing fluency. Usually most comfortable reading short books with simple narrative. Relies on rereading favorite or familiar books. Needs support with reading in some content areas and in using reference books and materials. Often produces products that demonstrate comprehension. Can apply some meaningful concepts to situations in his/her own life.

2 LIMITED READER
A reader who is beginning to develop fluency. Is most comfortable reading short books with simple or repetitive narrative or his/her own writing. May be a reluctant reader who rarely chooses to read for pleasure. Needs help reading in content areas or unfamiliar materials. Has difficulty using reference materials. Seldom produces products that independently demonstrate comprehension.

1 EMERGING READER
A reader who has yet to develop fluency. Needs help selecting and reading most material. May be a reluctant reader or one who finds it easiest to read familiar and/or repetitive materials. Rarely able to produce a product that demonstrates comprehension. (Teacher may supply descriptors.)

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APPENDIX D

REPORT CARD CRITERIA FOR WRITING

Appendix D

Report Card Criteria For Writing

(Collection of papers)

6 EXCEPTIONAL WRITER
Enthusiastic, independent and reflective writer who uses a wide range of techniques to engage the reader. Writing is well-developed, shows originality, has voice, sense of humor or suspense. Writing consistently addresses the topic or prompt, shows organizational plan, and has clear sentence sense and variety. Vocabulary shows maturity in choice and arrangement. Minimal errors in language conventions and spelling occur.

5 STRONG WRITER
Self-motivated and confident writer who uses a wide range of techniques to engage the reader. Writing addresses the topic or prompt, shows clear organization and has varied sentence structure. Vocabulary shows maturity and is appropriate. Few errors in language conventions and spelling occur.

4 COMPETENT WRITER
Usually demonstrates skill and confidence as a writer. Writing addresses the topic or prompt, shows some organizational plan, uses appropriate vocabulary and varied sentence structure that may include fragments and/or run-ons. Writing may include language convention and spelling errors.

3 DEVELOPING WRITER
Is developing fluency and writes with some confidence. Writing usually addresses the topic or prompt. The writer uses some descriptive words, but may lack organization. Some language convention and spelling errors are evident.

2 LIMITED WRITER
May be a reluctant writer or have limited experience in writing. Writing may stray from the topic or prompt and/or contain vague or confusing statements. Writer uses simple sentences, fragments, and run-ons, and vocabulary may be limited. Spelling and errors in conventions affect readability.

1 EMERGING WRITER
Understands that oral language can be written. Writes word by word. Writes with guidance. Usually observes word boundaries. Uses beginning letters to represent words. (Teacher may supply descriptors.)

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APPENDIX E

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING WRITING

Appendix E

Criteria For Evaluating Writing

(Adaptation of Criteria From Report Card)

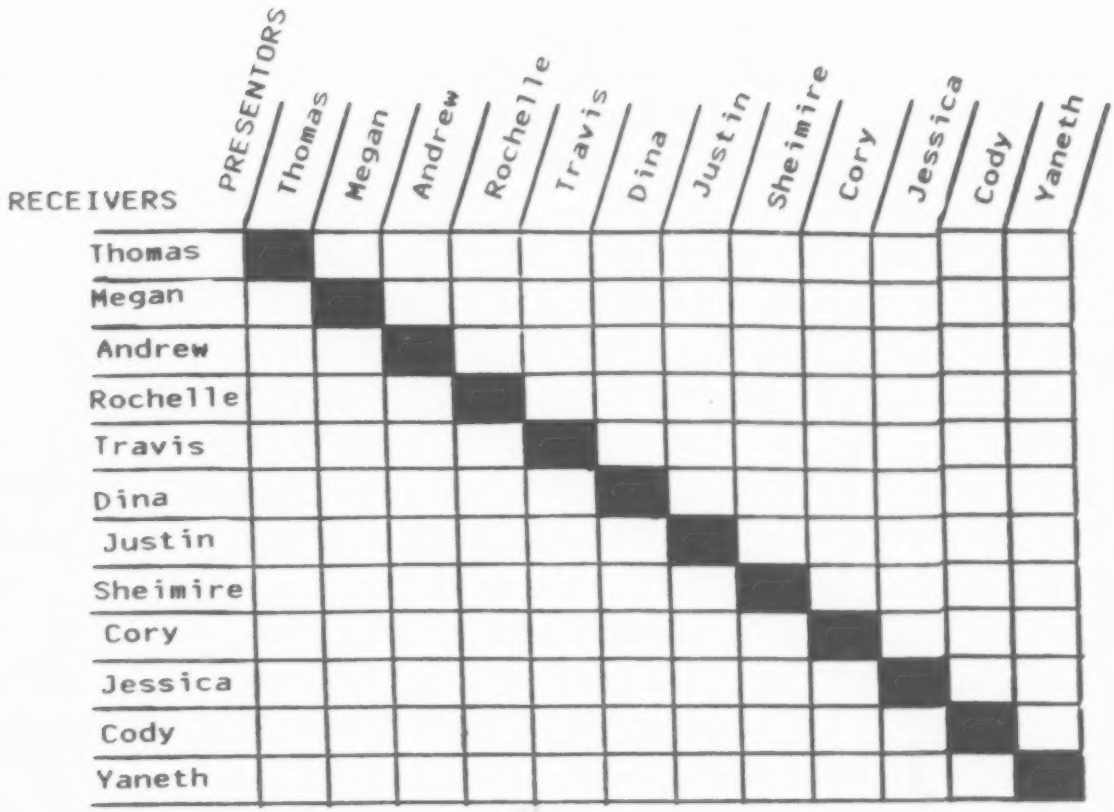
Beginning Writing	Developing Writing	Advanced Writing
*Mostly tells *Word choices poor, ineffective *May not keep to the topic *Doesn't reach closure, just stops *Little sentence variety *Lacks organization; choppy, jumps *No sequence, hard to understand *Sentences may be incomplete or not clear *No character development; descriptions *Many errors in form; mechanics	*Some showing, some telling *Words general, not specific *May have topic sentence and/or clear closure *Some sentence variety *Less sequenced; lacks order *Parts incomplete *Some form or mechanical errors *Some copying or imitative writing *Characters not completely developed *Few details or descriptors	*Shows, doesn't tell *Good word choices; interesting *Topic and closing sentences *Variety of sentences; detailed *Events sequenced, logical *Characters clearly described and well developed *Ideas well-explained, complete *Good form and mechanics *Creative, original work

APPENDIX F

CHECKOFF GRID FOR PRESENTING AND RECEIVING

Appendix F

Checkoff Grid For Presenting And Receiving



KEY

? = Asked a question

+ = Made a positive comment

S = Gave a suggestion for improvement

APPENDIX G

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS TO ENCOURAGE READING AND WRITING AT HOME

Appendix G

Suggestions For Parents To Encourage

Reading And Writing At Home

Dear Parents,

Concerned parents frequently ask what they can do to encourage their children to become better readers and writers. I would like to share with you some of the suggestions teachers believe are helpful.

1. First of all, parents and other significant adults can be good role models. Children should see you reading and writing in your daily life activities. This will prove how important these skills are in real life.

2. Obtain library cards for everyone in the family. Visit the city library regularly. Read for pleasure as well as for information. The librarian can help you select books to meet each child's interest and reading ability.
3. Read with your children. Begin before your children start preschool and continue reading aloud to them through sixth grade. Set aside quiet time daily for reading and writing activities.

4. Provide a variety of materials to read. Subscribe to a newspaper and have magazines and books available in your home. Give books and stationary as gifts in the family.
5. Provide reasons for your child to write. Invitations to a birthday party, thank you notes to grandparents and holiday greeting cards are a few suggestions. Children enjoy receiving mail.

6. Establish a regular time and place for daily homework with no interruptions, good lighting and space to work. Provide paper, pencils, and a dictionary. Monitor the homework to be aware of what the child is learning in school and to see that he understands the assignments.

Students need to understand that learning is a lifelong process. Good study habits will help him throughout his life to reach his personal goals. Let him know you are interested in his progress and communicate with his teacher as often as you need to in order to support his learning program.

Thank you for your interest and support. Together we can help each child grow and learn.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Scott

APPENDIX H

PARENT PRE SURVEY REGARDING REPORT CARDS AND CONFERENCES

Appendix H

Parent Pre Survey

Please rank in order, those things which are most important for you to know about your child's behavior at school.

___His adjustment in the class. (Does he ask questions, volunteer as a monitor, participate in class discussions)
___His social interactions. (Does he have many friends, take turns, show consideration for others, observe classroom and playground rules, leave distractive things at home)
___His level of respect. (Does he relate well to adults, respect authority, use school supplies wisely)
___His math skills.(Can he perform the basic four processes (+-x-), does he remember skills learned before, how quickly does he master new skills, can he solve problems)
___His reading ability. (Is he able to read material at his grade level, what does he like to read, can he decode new words, does he show an understanding of what he reads, is his oral reading fluent)
___His writing skills. (Can he write his own ideas and knowledge in sentences and paragraphs, is he able to find his own mistakes in grammar, spelling, structure and format, and correct them, does he write often and fluently, does he regularly use a dictionary)
___His printing and writing ability. (Is his printing/writing legible and of appropriate size for this grade, has he moved successfully from printing to writing)
___His study skills. (Is he a good listener, does he usually follows directions, show follow through by completing work assigned, use his time wisely)
___His work habits. (Is his work done in a timely manner, is his work generally accurate and readable, does he take pride in how his work appears, concentrate on his own work)
___His awareness of himself as a capable person (Does he assume responsibility for completing classroom and homework, is he concerned about personal cleanliness and good health habits, show evidence of positive self-esteem, have good attendance and usually arrive on time, show awareness of his purpose in school)

How often have you been involved in (rather than informed about) assessing your child's educational progress?
___never ___sometimes ___often

How often, to your knowledge, has your child been involved in evaluating his own progress?
___probably never ____perhaps sometimes ____often

APPENDIX I

PARENT POST SURVEY REGARDING REPORT CARDS AND CONFERENCING

Parent Post Survey

1. Do letter grades on present report cards give you enough information about how your child is achieving academically?

2. Do letter grades on present report cards give you enough information about how your child is progressing...
* in reading?____ * in language?_____ * in writing?____

3. Do you usually participate regularly in parent-teacher conferences to discuss your child's progress?_____
If yes, did you attend a conference this year?_____
How often do you participate in a conference for your child?
_____

4. Is the conference usually by phone or in person?_____

5. How often does your child's teacher communicate with you regarding class goals for the year, activities, and student achievement? _____
Is it in writing, in talking or both methods?_____

Check any that apply:

___report cards only
___phone calls
___student work sent home
___student contracts
___some notes sent home
___regular notes sent home
___notes for behavior only
___homework asking for parent signature

6. Recognizing that finding a convenient time when parents and teachers can meet together for a conference is difficult....when such conferences concentrate on academic growth rather than on behavior problems how do you feel about conferencing to discuss report cards and student progress:

___ It is unnecessary because it does not help me to better understand my child's progress.

___ It can be helpful in better understanding what my child is learning and I find out more about his own level of learning.

___ It is usually very helpful. I become more aware of what is being taught and the teacher's expectations for my child. I find out more specifically what my child can do, and see evidence of my child's progress as well as his rate of development.